



U.S. Department of Justice

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **DISTRICT WOMAN SENTENCED TO 13 YEARS IN PRISON FOR GROUP HOME KILLING**

WASHINGTON - Donna Gardner, 48, was sentenced today to 13 years of incarceration for killing 69-year-old Helen May during a robbery in a group home for mentally ill adults in December of 2008, Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips announced. The Honorable Herbert Dixon, Jr., Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, imposed the sentence this morning. Gardner plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter before Judge Dixon on June 18, 2009.

According to evidence presented at the plea hearing, on Sunday, December 14, 2008, at approximately 4:20 p.m., a Metropolitan Police Department 911 operator received a call from the defendant, Donna Gardner. During the call, the defendant told the dispatcher that she had smothered and killed her roommate, Helen May, while robbing Ms. May of money in order to buy cocaine. Police arrived on the scene, a group home for the mentally ill in the 5400 block of Blair Road, NE, Washington, D.C., and shortly thereafter found Ms. May dead and the defendant still on the phone with the dispatcher. An autopsy revealed evidence of asphyxiation due to suffocation as well as broken ribs.

After the defendant's arrest on the scene, police transported her to the Homicide Branch where she waived her rights and gave a videotaped statement. During the interview, the defendant said that she had been smoking crack cocaine with a male friend, and that she had returned to the decedent's bedroom at around 4:30 a.m. in an attempt to steal money. The defendant said that when she attempted to steal the decedent's purse, a struggle ensued in the decedent's bedroom. During the struggle the decedent began to scream and make noises. The defendant said that she then punched the decedent several times in the face with a closed fist until she fell on the ground. Once on the ground, the defendant grabbed the decedent's nose and stuffed covers into the decedent's mouth until the decedent stopped moving. After the decedent stopped moving, the defendant opened her purse and stole \$88 in coins. The defendant then took the coins to a nearby Giant Food Store and utilized the Coinstar machine to convert the coins into paper money. Upon leaving the Giant, the defendant used the money to buy more cocaine. The

defendant later returned to the group home and called the police.

In announcing today's sentence, Acting U.S. Attorney Phillips praised the efforts of a number of Metropolitan Police Department officers, including Detectives Darin March, Al Batton, Wayne Marable, Duane Corbett and Anthony McGee, as well as Mobile Crime Technician James Holder. He also recognized the work done in this case by Victim Witness Advocate Marcie Rinker of the U.S. Attorney's Office and Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Gillice, who prosecuted the case.

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